

CLAIMS

1. Apparatus for automatically building an electronic form for presentation to a user during a data capture process, comprising:
 - 5 means for receiving as input a specification of data elements required during data capture, each data element having a type specification, and a logical relationship relative to other data elements in a hierarchical structure;
 - means for generating, from said input, a data capture definition file providing said specification of data elements and said hierarchical structure
 - 10 in a predetermined format; and
 - means for receiving said data capture definition file and automatically generating a plurality of visual displays for presentation to a user during execution of a data capture process, each visual display comprising a plurality of user input areas corresponding to the data elements and
 - 15 physically positioned on the display in a manner corresponding to the defined logical hierarchical structure.
2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the means for generating generates said data capture definition file in XML format.
- 20 3. The apparatus of claim 1 or claim 2 in which the data capture definition file further includes a functional specification of data validation operations to be performed in respect of at least some of said data elements during execution of said data capture process, said means for receiving
- 25 further including means for executing said data validation operations during said data capture process.
4. The apparatus of any one of claims 1 to 3 in which the data capture definition file further includes a functional specification of rule-based
- 30 actions to be taken during execution of the data capture process, said means

for receiving further including means for executing said rule-based actions during said data capture process, and determining successive visual displays for presentation to the user during the data capture process according to values of data captured and the rule-based actions applicable thereto.

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5. The apparatus of claim 1 in which the means for generating the data capture definition file further includes means for incorporating a functional specification of a data model defining the bindings of data elements with an output message format.

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6. The apparatus of claim 1 in which the means for generating the data capture definition file further includes means for incorporating a functional specification of data exchange requirements according to a form definition standard.

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7. The apparatus of claim 1 in which the means for generating the data capture definition file further includes means for enabling automatic building of portions of said data capture definition file according to a form definition standard.

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8. The apparatus of claim 4 in which the means for generating the data capture definition file further includes means for incorporating said rule-based actions to be performed during execution of the data capture process, by a rule builder interface that enables rule actions and conditions to be
25 assigned to data capture events.

9. The apparatus of claim 1 in which the means for generating further includes binding interface means for incorporating binding definitions into said data capture definition file, each binding definition defining the binding
30 of a data element to a defined external data model.

10. The apparatus of claim 1 further including means for ensuring that said specification of data elements complies with a form definition standard.
- 5 11. The apparatus of claim 1 further including means for executing a data capture process, comprising:
- means for receiving a data capture definition file;
 - means for generating a succession of visual displays for presentation to a user, the physical layout of said visual displays being determined during
- 10 execution of the data capture process, according to the defined data elements and their hierarchical structure in the data capture definition file, and according to process and display conditions prevailing in the platform executing the data capture process.
- 15 12. The apparatus of claim 11 in which the means for executing the data capture process further includes means for executing data validation operations according to a functional specification of data validation operations defined in said data capture definition file.
- 20 13. The apparatus of claim 11 in which the means for executing the data capture process further includes means for executing rule-based actions according to a functional specification of rule-based actions defined in said data capture definition file.
- 25 14. Apparatus for generating a data capture definition file for defining data elements required from a user during a data capture process, comprising:
- means for receiving as input a specification of data elements required during data capture, each data element having a type specification, and a
- 30 logical relationship relative to other data elements in a hierarchical structure,

said type specifications and said hierarchical structure being usable for automatically determining a physical layout of visual displays for presentation to a user during a subsequent data capture process;

means for associating, with said data elements, a set of data validation requirements for validating data captured in respect of each of the data elements;

means for associating, with said data elements, a set of rules for execution during a subsequent data capture process, for further enabling automatic determination of a physical layout of the visual displays to be presented to a user during said subsequent data capture process based on values of data captured during said data capture process;

means for generating said data capture definition file providing said specification of data elements, said hierarchical structure, said data validation requirements and said set of rules in a predetermined format for subsequent execution by a data capture process.

15. The apparatus of claim 14 wherein the data capture definition file conforms to a standard that can be executed on a plurality of different platforms.

16. The apparatus of claim 15 in which the data capture definition file is generated in XML format.

17. The apparatus of claim 14 further including means for incorporating, into said data capture definition file, a functional specification of data exchange requirements according to a form definition standard.

18. The apparatus of claim 14 further including means for enabling automatic building of portions of said data capture definition file according to a form definition standard.

19. The apparatus of claim 14 further including binding interface means for incorporating binding definitions into said data capture definition file, each binding definition defining the binding of a data element to a defined
5 external data model.

20. The apparatus of claim 14 further including means for ensuring that said specification of data elements complies with a form definition standard.

10 21. The apparatus of claim 14 further including means for assigning, to each data capture definition file, document ownership and execution rights.

22. The apparatus of claim 14 further including means for generating at least a part of the data capture definition file by automatic copying of a
15 global template.

23. The apparatus of claim 22 further including means for correlating changes made in global templates with relevant parts of data capture definition files that have been built using those templates.

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24. The apparatus of claim 23 further including means for generating an impact analysis report identifying potential consequences to relevant data capture definition files resulting from a proposed change to a template.

25 25. The apparatus of claim 14 further including a document validation module for ensuring compliance of a generated data capture definition file with at least one of a form definition standard, a function definition standard and a data model standard.

26. The apparatus of claim 14 in which the means for generating said data capture definition file further includes means for associating each data element with a respective section or sub-section in said logical hierarchical structure.

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27. The apparatus of claim 11 in which the means for generating a succession of visual displays further comprises:

means for inferring a relative physical positioning of user prompts for data element capture and a sequential progression of user prompts for data
10 element capture from the data capture definition file, and

means for determining absolute physical positioning of user prompts and presentation styles thereof according to criteria defined in the means for executing the data capture process, and not the data capture definition file.

15 28. The apparatus of claim 28 in which the means for generating said data capture definition file and the means for generating a succession of visual displays operate on different computing platforms.

29. Apparatus for generating a generating an electronic form for
20 presentation to a user during a data capture process, the apparatus comprising:

means for receiving as input a data capture definition file in a predetermined format providing a specification of data elements required during data capture, each data element having a type specification and a
25 logical relationship relative to other data elements in a hierarchical structure;

means for automatically generating a plurality of visual displays for presentation to the user, each visual display including a plurality of user input areas and user prompts relating thereto corresponding to the data elements, each being physically positioned on the displays in a manner
30 corresponding to the defined logical hierarchical structure.

30. A method of automatically building an electronic form for presentation to a user during a data capture process, comprising the steps of:

receiving as input a specification of data elements required during
5 data capture, each data element having a type specification, and a logical relationship relative to other data elements in a hierarchical structure;

generating, from said input, a data capture definition file providing said specification of data elements and said hierarchical structure in a predetermined format; and

10 receiving said data capture definition file and automatically generating a plurality of visual displays for presentation to a user during execution of a data capture process, each visual display comprising a plurality of user input areas corresponding to the data elements and physically positioned on the display in a manner corresponding to the
15 defined logical hierarchical structure.

31. A method of generating a data capture definition file for defining data elements required from a user during a data capture process, comprising the steps of:

20 receiving as input a specification of data elements required during data capture, each data element having a type specification, and a logical relationship relative to other data elements in a hierarchical structure, said type specifications and said hierarchical structure being usable for automatically determining a physical layout of visual displays for
25 presentation to a user during a subsequent data capture process;

associating, with said data elements, a set of data validation requirements for validating data captured in respect of each of the data elements;

associating, with said data elements, a set of rules for execution
30 during a subsequent data capture process, for further enabling automatic

determination of a physical layout of the visual displays to be presented to a user during said subsequent data capture process based on values of data captured during said data capture process;

5 generating said data capture definition file providing said specification of data elements, said hierarchical structure, said data validation requirements and said set of rules in a predetermined format for subsequent execution by a data capture process.

32. A method of generating a generating an electronic form for
10 presentation to a user during a data capture process, comprising the steps of:

receiving as input a data capture definition file in a predetermined format providing a specification of data elements required during data capture, each data element having a type specification and a logical relationship relative to other data elements in a hierarchical structure;

15 automatically generating a plurality of visual displays for presentation to the user, each visual display including a plurality of user input areas and user prompts relating thereto corresponding to the data elements, each being physically positioned on the displays in a manner corresponding to the defined logical hierarchical structure.

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33. A computer program product, comprising a computer readable medium having thereon computer program code means adapted, when said program is loaded onto a computer, to make the computer execute the procedure of any one of claims 30 to 32

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34. A computer program, distributable by electronic data transmission, comprising computer program code means adapted, when said program is loaded onto a computer, to make the computer execute the procedure of any one of claims 30 to 32.

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35. Apparatus substantially as described herein with reference to the accompanying drawings.